

A VENTURE INTO NEEDLE AND THREAD

Every so often, my wife needs some quilt supplies that require a trip to Quilting in the Country, the closest store to Cedar Crossing. The quilt shop is located just outside Dogwood Village on the picturesque farm of Mike and Jan Moore. Jan and daughter Kelley run the store while Mike lends a hand with accounting and maintenance. This fine family goes to Zion Lutheran Church in Dogwood Village. As we approached the store, Mike saw me from his tractor in the adjacent field. Mike and I then assumed the position that most of the males visiting the store take—sitting in the rocking chairs on the front porch. After exchanging the usual pleasantries, Mike told me of his experience in the fabric arts. Mike also dabbles in stories and tales, and he tries to show the parallel between the two fields.

Pastor Arnie

Every quilt or fabric art project has a story. It may be a part of the maker's memory, a vision of the future, a reminder of what's important, a figment of the imagination, or just a celebration of life.

Our house is a mini museum of fabric art. Every season and every holiday, a new exhibit adorns its walls. Today, on this crisp autumn morning, I'm looking at fall in all directions—a pumpkin seed quilt spread out on the bed; wool pumpkins and ghosts of every shape and size hanging on walls; appliqued autumn leaf towels draped here and there in the kitchen; harvest stitcheries occupying all the little nooks and crannies; quilted wall hangings in yellows, reds, and oranges adorning the larger wall spaces.

Some of the stories I see in all these projects contribute to my inspiration in crafting with pen and paper (an ancient form of communication). Now that I think about it, I have been called ancient myself. Some days, the walls taunt me. Will all those jack-o'-lantern wall hangings coerce me into a scary Halloween tale? You never know.

Have you ever been lying in bed and at the stroke of midnight an idea for a quilt hits you? Or maybe you're working on a project late into the night (much later than you should be, but you just want to finish one more block) and squares start becoming circles and circles start becoming squares or stars turn into flowers and flowers into stars? Then they all become animated and rise up off your sewing table. When the morning comes, you can't remember where you left off or what you need to do next. By now, I'm sure you see the parallel with a story or tale.

An idea can strike me anyplace, anytime. But I am old, so I must compensate. A handy little black book with a pen, always carried with me, solves that minor problem of brain aging. No more "What was it I was thinking?". I have even entered the twenty-first century and sent myself an e-mail from my smartphone with an idea. I hesitate to make that method well known, though. It would somehow taint my image as simple and ancient. I have a stash of notes as big as the stash of fabric in our house ... well, no ... I guess nothing I amass could ever be that big.

There was a point in my life where I thought I would give the craft of needle and thread a try. After all, as a well-hued, coordinated, athletic type, I did not see any problem tackling the kinds of projects I saw every day when I walked through the house.

My first attempt consisted of a cross-stitch kit purchased at the local variety store. A simple floral scene—no problem. About halfway through, the leaves on my project got the blight. The rose flowers looked like a mutated hybrid between a rose and a daisy. At seventy-five percent of completion, I abandoned construction. To be honest, I could no longer come up with a plausible story to explain away all the blood stains.

Then I thought, “You know, I’m more of a machine kind of guy. I’ve been operating and repairing all kinds of farm and construction equipment all my life. Perhaps I should give consideration to a project using a sewing machine.”

My wife and my daughter both have these expensive computer sewing machines. Man, they are nice ... and they’ve got lots of power—argh, argh, argh. I began my foray into machine quilting

with a simple log cabin project, some cheap fabric my wife picked up at a garage sale, and a small sewing machine that had a little plaque on it saying, ‘My Very First Sewing Machine’.

That project I actually completed. Of course, the simple log cabin looked more like a drunkard’s path—and I don’t even drink. My wife always signs her projects by stitching her initials and date on the front or by putting a label on the back. I put a label on the back of my quilt and signed my daughter’s name to it, at age five.

Today, I’m not even sure where my uncompleted cross-stitch lives. It’s probably in the attic somewhere gathering mildew on its flower parts—which is only appropriate, I suppose. I do know that my quilt project is behind the seat in my pickup truck. I use it to lie on whenever I must crawl underneath a machine to make a repair.

I have since concluded that the macho neurons in my brain lack the skills of good communication with my fingers to consider myself a needle and thread artiste. My aspirations (or possibly delusions) of creativity must take another course. I did manage to design a quilted wall

hanging called “Good News”. It’s a colorful display of expanding crosses with interpretive value. I left the construction of the project to the expert construction manager of the house.

Now, I won’t claim that any of the tales I contribute to *Tales, Truths, and Hybrids* will motivate you to create a grand piece of fabric art or drastically improve your eye-hand coordination for hand stitching—no, I won’t make such bold statements (although, it is always possible, but it would be too hard to authenticate). I will say that expanding the imagination by consuming such stories and tales is currently being studied by a world-famous university under the guidance of the federal government and an unnamed art society. It is my opinion that such research is fruitless. They’ve never asked me for any supplemental input. Some value is so deeply buried that only an exceptional mind could ever find it.

Search the internet and you will find a plethora of sites and videos offering tips and knowledge to expand your artistic skills and creativity in quilting and fabric arts. When I need advice on something, perhaps a technique or how

much flavoring to add to a story, I am not the least bit hesitant to call on my friend, Buford. He is an equipment mechanic and self-described expert on a wide range of subjects. He has a talent for getting to the heart of the matter, in a roundabout way.

If, at any point, there are not enough tales about needle and thread to satisfy your insatiable appetite for self-torment, then I would recommend that you continue to consume similar stories and tales in the other collections. They couldn't be any worse—could they?

You can take some comfort in one very indisputable fact. Just as there will always be another quilt to quilt or another project to create, there is a parallel universe of tales and stories. As long as there are minds to consume such material, I shall continue producing these fine works and contributing to the collections. I am quite confident of the quality of these stories and tales ... okay, maybe moderately confident ... or, at least, confident enough that I'm willing to go out on a limb and put my own name on the collection instead of my daughter's.

Happy stitching and/or reading,

Mike Moore